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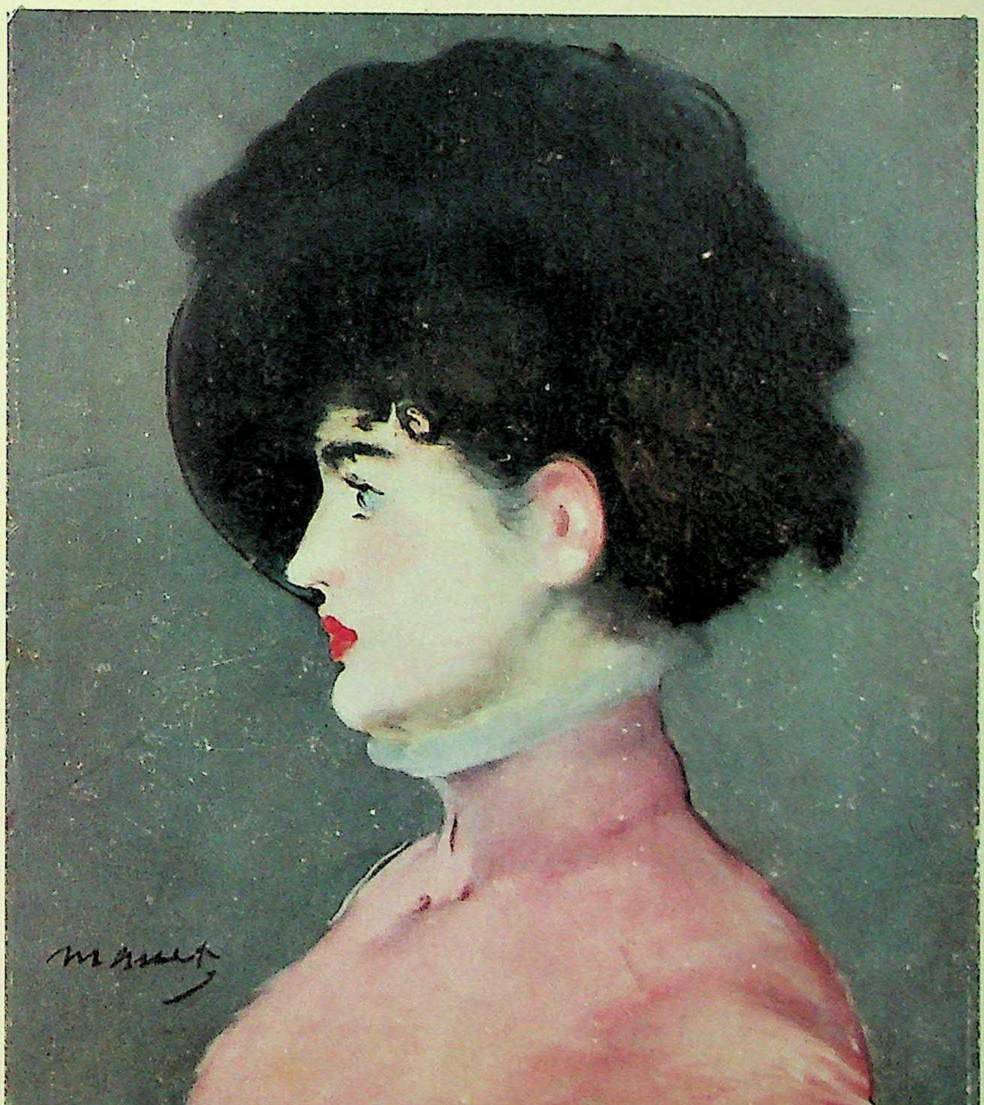

INTRODUCTION BY
DOUGLAS COOPER

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IRMA BRUNNER
(55 × 47 cm.) 1882
Musée du Louvre, Paris

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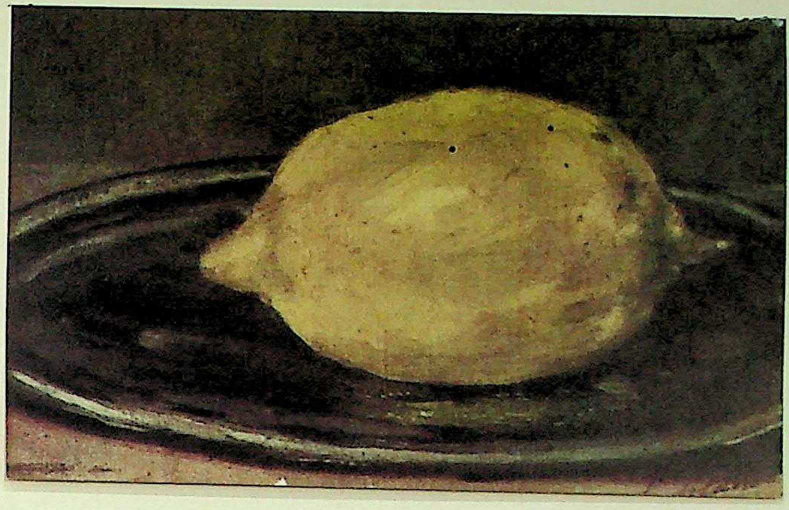

For John

THE HISTORY of French painting in the 19th century is a story of a succession of sensational masterpieces, of small and not too long-lived groups of artists and of brilliant individuals. It is a story of scandals, frustrations and early deaths—the *Radeau de la Méduse*; Géricault and Bonington both dead before the age of 35; Gros' suicide; Delacroix' continued rejection by the Institut; Daumier living in hiding; *Un Enterrement à Ornans;* Fantin-Latour, Whistler and Millet rejected by the Salon in 1859-60; the Salon des Refusés in 1863; *Olympia;* Monet penniless; the Impressionist Exhibitions of the 1870's; *La Grande Jatte;* Van Gogh's suicide and Seurat's death at the age of 32; the Caillebotte bequest; Cézanne mocked and Gauguin abandoned in the South Seas. Then too it is the story of man's acceptance of nature as such. And arising out of this, the story of the rejection of a single ideal of beauty and, ultimately, of man's discovery of living beauty in the contemporary scene. It is the story of the heroic struggle of a few great artists to defend their way of seeing and painting as the true form of art against a hide-bound and bigoted society. It is a struggle between a lively, rising and frustrated tradition and a sterile, moribund academicism clinging obstinately to the last vestiges of its authority, a struggle which ended in death for the latter and for the former in the acquisition of a degree of artistic freedom which has still not been fully explored. And if one has to choose, from among the great individual figures of the century, one painter in whose life and work are reflected practically all the elements to which reference has been made, then it is assuredly the name of Edouard Manet which first comes to mind.

Traditionalist, revolutionary despite himself, believer in naturalism, elegant and cultured member of that bourgeoisie which dominated France during the whole century, victim of repeated persecution, man of his time, liberal, supreme practitioner of his art—Manet, who coveted official honours and a respectable kind of fame (for he never doubted his own greatness), became against his will the centre of some of the greatest artistic controversies of all time. And even in death he is allowed neither peace nor security. For fashion has willed that, in the public estimation, his fame should be temporarily eclipsed by the Impressionists; and so, like Courbet, who died in unmerited ignominy, Manet has never been accorded the recognition due to one of France's very greatest painters. There have been writers who have held that he was no more than a brilliant *pasticheur* who achieved notoriety by involving himself in an artistic revolution for which he was not responsible; and on the other hand, writers like Roger Fry have only seen in him the last great traditional painter who, through persecution, was forced into an unhappy position "in the vanguard of the Impressionist revolt". And from this the conclusion has been drawn: "It is a sad story. The bitterness of his enemies threw him into the arms of his friends, and his friends achieved his ruin". Nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed as we become less and less blinded by the sheer virtuosity of the Impressionists, the figure of Manet stands out more and more as a great independent master, a pathfinder who made possible much that came after him. His were the great technical innovations which paved the way from the early to the late 19th century, he was the first painter boldly to insist on local colours, and because of a deeply felt vision his works have lost none of their original vitality. Manet is as modern today as in his own time. We look back to Ingres and Delacroix and remain static, but when we look back to Courbet and Manet we are carried forwards because they dared to be natural and to look fixedly into the present, extracting their pictorial symbols from their immediate visual experiences. Indeed Courbet's famous description of himself, which occurs in the Preface to the Catalogue of his Exhibition in Paris in 1855, might almost be applied retrospectively to Manet; "I have studied the art of the masters and the art of the moderns, avoiding any preconceived system and without prejudice. I have no more wanted to imitate the former than to copy the latter; nor have I thought of achieving the idle aim of *art for art's sake.* No! I have simply wanted to draw from a thorough knowledge of tradition the reasoned and free sense of my own individuality. To know in order to do: such has been my idea. To be able to translate the customs, ideas and appearance of my time as I see them—in a word to create a living art. This has been my aim."

Nevertheless there is a fundamental difference between Courbet and Manet—a difference of social background. Both realised (and they were the first in their time to discover this truism) that painting appeals directly to the eye, both had a marvellously true eye and a hand that could record with incredible ease and precision what was seen, both trusted to instinct to seize on a paintable subject from the complex vision of the passing world. Yet where Courbet, a hard peasant of sound common sense, pushed indiscriminately on, painting anything that pleased him, unhindered by considerations of taste or the intellectual pre-occupations of a cultured mind, Manet, the refined and educated bourgeois, conservative and respectable at heart, was assailed by doubts concerning the best way of reconciling his disturbingly personal vision with the accepted conventions handed down by the masters. Courbet accepted as of equal value anything that came along, so that his work falters between extremes of sensibility and grandeur and depths of vulgarity and common-placeness. Manet on the other hand reserved the right to select. To Courbet, realism was a nice simple idea. It implied sitting down and painting whatever he saw, no matter how unpleasing or casual. Nature was beautiful as such and there was no obligation on the artist "to raise and improve it". "It's all the same to me wherever I sit", he said to Corot, "everything is fine so long as nature is before one's eyes". Manet was never in this sense a slave to natural appearances. He did not sit down and paint just what he saw, probably because, like Degas, he felt that "painting (was) no sport". Manet depended on direct visual experiences and believed, with Corot, that the artist should "never lose sight of the first impression by which (he was) moved". To him realism meant painting scenes that looked natural rather than like frozen images. He turned his back on Greeks, Romans and Egyptians, and on sentimental costume pieces of all kinds, because he felt like Proudhon that neither had they a bearing on contemporary life nor did they tell the spectator anything about Greek or Roman life of the period which they purported to depict. But this did not mean that he turned his back on the great masters of the past. On the contrary, though Manet never looked to his predecessors to provide him with subject-matter it was to them that he turned to discover the essential secrets of his art. For Manet was too much of a traditionalist to believe that it sufficed for an artist simply to record his visual sensations. And in this context let me quote Jeanniot's account in the *Grande Revue* of his visit to Manet's studio in 1882: "Although Manet paints his pictures from life, he does not in the least copy nature. I could not help noticing his masterly simplifications. The head of the woman was modelled, but the painter's modelling was not for a moment obtained by the means offered by nature. Everything was simplified". For Manet, realism was achieved by a blend of actuality and unreality. His pictures came alive because he painted contemporary subjects, because his themes were real, everyday experiences not frigid, remote historical *tableaux* and because he accepted human beings behaving as he saw them. But Manet was greatly concerned with the technical refinements of the painter's art. He believed that a picture had to be a visual impression recreated with the assistance of an effort of the mind. And so he had no hesitation in building up a pictorial image which appeared realistic because it was composed of selected realistic details. He decided, that is to say, that in order to express himself with the utmost clarity and realism, he could afford to disregard those narrative and descriptive details which would confuse the image. For, after all, the eye does not take in every detail of a scene at a single glance. And it is one of Manet's major achievements that he could indulge in this form of simplification without becoming involved in idealisation or distortion. Manet saw clearly that the European tradition of painting had been almost throttled by the joint efforts of the Académie, the new bourgeois public and M. Ingres. Paint had lost its most meaningful properties, colour was but a decorative adjunct of design and painters were expected to tell stories rather than delight in the lyrical and evocative possibilities of their medium. Manet therefore devoted himself to an attempt to breathe new life into an old, neglected but true tradition before its death was assured. And he made a heroic bid to show how easily the forms of established masters, whom all professed to admire, could be given new vitality and a modern significance. But because Manet picked up an unfashionable tradition which had been abruptly (and as the public thought finally) terminated by the intervention of David and Ingres, the Académie was unable to see in him anything but a dangerous revolutionary.

Manet, who was born in Paris on January 23, 1832, is one of the most misunderstood, unappreciated and attractive figures of his century. Painting, it seems, was only his second choice as a career, for his original ambition was to become a sailor—and a love of the sea and all things maritime forms one of the main themes of his work. But, having twice failed to pass the examinations for the Ecole Navale, Manet decided that his alternative profession had to be thoroughly mastered. So in September 1850 he entered the studio of Thomas Couture, one of the younger professors of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and a pupil of Gros and Delaroche, whose reputation was then at its height after the success of his *Romans of the Decadence* at the

Salon of 1847. Now it is remarkable that, despite an obvious dislike of this academic *milieu*, and despite frequent rows with his elected teacher, Manet not only remained studying for six years but continued to set store by Couture's judgment even after he had left his studio. Manet had a firm belief in the efficacy of a rigorous academic training, but was fully aware that it was only to be acquired in an atmosphere of artificiality. "I don't know what I'm doing here", he is reported as saying to his fellow-student Antonin Proust. "Everything one looks at is ridiculous. The light is false, the shadows are false. When I enter the studio it feels like entering the tomb". He criticised the ridiculous postures adopted by the models. "Cant' you be natural?" he would say. "Do you really stand like that when you are buying vegetables?" He complained that they always had to pose in the nude, and on one occasion, to the fury of Couture, persuaded one to retain part of his clothing. "Anyone can see that you can't ask a model to undress in the street. But there are, after all, fields and since the nude is, apparently, the alpha and omega of art, why shouldn't one, in summer at least, paint nude studies in a landscape?" In vain Manet tried to make these professional *poseurs* relax. "M. Manet", replied one who had been in the business for thirty years and evidently felt that the adoption of natural poses threatened the whole future of his profession, "M. Manet, thanks to me more than one young painter has gone to Rome". "But we aren't in Rome and we don't want to go there", came the quick retort. "We're in Paris and that's where we'll stay". On another occasion, stung by Couture's criticism of his work, he replied that he was only prepared to paint what *he* saw and not what it pleased others to see. "Well, my friend", answered the master, "if you think you're founding a school go and do it elsewhere". So Manet was sent away from the studio. But even this did not deter him from his chosen course of study, for at the end of a month he came humbly back.

In these first six years is to be found the whole key to Manet's artistic development. For he quickly realised two things: that, through the failure of the Ecole (and all other academies, incidentally) to keep touch with life, a failure for which the aesthetic prejudices of the public were in part to blame, art had gradually ossified and the true tradition had been lost. Painting was then no more than a horrifying and meaningless display of misplaced competence. Yet it was characteristic of Manet to see that if he was ever to revive the true tradition he must first learn to master the fundamentals of academic technique. These he could still learn in that tombhouse called the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. There and there only could he acquire all that technical accomplishment without which no painter can proceed to the realisation of his own vision. The limitations of this academic education had however to be thrown off before he would be free to take liberties. So Manet was continually broadening his academic training by working independently for many hours unsupervised in the life class at the Académie Suisse, one of the "free" academies which were then beginning to open in Paris. Then too, like Courbet before him, he spent hours in the Louvre studying the old masters in order to learn from them directly, how his acquired technique could be applied to living ends. Manet also travelled widely, and between 1853 and 1856 visited Italy (twice), Austria, Germany, Belgium and Holland. And from the list of copies after works by old masters that he made, both in the Louvre and on his travels, we can learn a great deal about the way in which he set out to form his own talent. For this list comprises several Italians—Giorgione *(Concert Champêtre)*, Veronese *(Marriage at Cana)*, Tintoretto *(Self-Portrait)* Titian *(Vierge au Lapin, Jupiter and Antiope, Venus of Urbino)*— two Dutchmen—Rembrandt *(The Anatomy Lesson)* and Brouwer *(The Smoker)*—one of his great French contemporaries—Delacroix *(La Barque de Dante)*—and significantly a small picture in the Louvre formerly attributed to Velasquez—*(Les Petits Cavaliers)*. Now the outstanding features of this list are the essentially painterly character of all the artists chosen (one notices particularly the emphasis on the Venetian school), the inclusion of painters of the Dutch and Spanish schools and the absence of classical masters such as Mantegna and Raphael. It is a list which proclaims the artistic tastes then forming, which came to dominate the latter half of the century. For it was by drawing on the Dutch, the Spanish and the Venetian painters that Delacroix, Courbet, the Barbizon masters and Manet were enabled to renew and develop again a tradition in France.

Now Manet did more than copy the old masters. He looked to them for guidance in matters of composition and ventured to interpret them in a contemporary sense. In fact it was not until after 1870—the *Portrait of Eva Gonzalès* (1870), obviously based on a Davidian prototype, and *Le Bon Bock* (1873), straight from Haarlem, are among the last examples—that he had sufficiently absorbed their lessons to be able to leave them behind. It is then no exaggeration to maintain that Manet's apprenticeship lasted at least twenty years (1850-1870): a short enough period when one considers the immense artistic changes which he had already begun to initiate and the harvest of great individual masterpieces which resulted during the years between the *Partie de Croquet à Boulogne* (1871) and the *Bar aux Folies-Bergère* (1882). This is not to suggest that Manet painted no great pictures before 1870. On the contrary, one has only to think of *Le Gamin au Chien* (1861), *La Musique aux Tuileries* (1862), (Plate II), *Portrait de Jeanne Duval* (1862), *Le Fifre* (1866), (Plate V), the portraits of Zacharie Astruc (1864), Zola (1867) and Duret (1868), as well as *Le Déjeuner* (1868) *La Lecture* (1868), (Plate VII), *Départ du Vapeur de Folkestone* (1869) and *Le Repos* (1869) to realise how early his individual personality began to assert itself. Yet in considering these pictures one has always to remember that they are the few brilliant exceptions in a period more characterised by heaviness, a certain artificiality and an obvious reliance on others. Manet felt his way slowly, often lapsing into artificiality. *La Pêche* (1860) is a clumsy pastiche of Rubens and Carracci; *Le Vieux Musicien* (1862) is a scarcely less hollow echo of Velasquez and Caravaggio; despite its enchantment, the *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* is, as its contemporaries felt, somewhat absurd; from the only remaining fragments—*Toréro Mort* and *Combat de Taureaux*—one can well believe the critic of the day who wrote of Manet's first bull-fight picture (1864) which he subsequently destroyed, that it looked like "a wooden matador killed by a rat"; *Le Buveur d'Eau* (1862), *Le Fumeur* (1866), *Les Bulles de Savon* (1867) and *Le Jeune Homme à la poire* (1869) are cleverly contrived bravura pieces but they are too much in the manner of Hals or Murillo to carry conviction; even *Olympia* (half Goya, half Velasquez), prim and uninterested by the arrival of her black maidservant with a bouquet or the black cat which has leapt on to her bed, cannot be absolved from unreality (Plate IV); *Le Balcon*, an interpretation of Goya's *Majas al Balcon*, can, despite its haunting drama, be accused of stiffness (Plate VIII); the *Execution of the Emperor Maximilian* (1867), an attempt to repeat Goya's *Tres de Mayo*, lacks all the horror and intensity of the original (Plate VI). Indeed, carefully studied, this last is almost absurd—all the soldiers have fired at close range, no victim has fallen and the sergeant in charge of the firing-party, who stands alone on the right uninterested in anything that is happening, is calmly cocking his rifle in preparation to give the *coup de grâce*. Yet all these pictures are redeemed by wonderful brushwork, and for this reason take their place without undue contrast beside those others which have already been mentioned. The real difference between the two groups lies in the fact that where the former is distinguished by an all-over brilliance and a personal vision which despite certain clumsy passages, has unity, the latter (and much larger) group is generally too ambitious in conception, disjointed and made up of passages as boring as others are magnificent. In short, one finds the attention chiefly held by outstanding details: the still-life in the *Déjeuner*, the bedclothes in *Olympia*, the figure of the sergeant in the *Execution*. Manet could make paint sing as few other painters. More than that: in all these pictures one finds already those startling innovations of colour which so shocked his contemporaries. For example, he was the first painter who, when he wanted a white, black or green, unashamedly applied these colours in their pure state to his canvas. Then again, instead of working up a transparent colour from a ground, Manet applied colour in a single wash and obtained the equivalent of the old-fashioned transparency by true and exact relationships of tone. He painted, that is to say, as directly as possible, transposing his sensations immediately and thereby simplifying the painter's technique. "In painting only one thing is true", he wrote, "to get down at one go what one sees. If you bring that off it's all right. If not, you must start again. Anything else is false". This was the means by which Manet created his effect of spontaneity. Thus it is recorded that Antonin Proust's top-hat was removed and re-painted thirty times before the artist was satisfied, while Berthe Morisot says that Eva Gonzalès had to pose for her portrait forty times, because after each session Manet would wash out the painting of her head.

Despite Zola's self-satisfied pronouncement in 1868 that "the success of Edouard Manet is complete", no painter of the 19th century was as persistently persecuted and condemned. And none felt it more acutely. The Emperor, the critics, the public, the jury of the Salon—all were scandalised. His fame as a madman and eccentric was so widespread that even a customs officer at Hendaye recognised his name on a trunk. He hardly sold a picture before the age of forty. His only real successes at the Salon were the *Guitarrero* (1861), for which he was awarded an honourable mention, and *Le Bon Bock*, both of them new-old masters. Even in 1878 the jury of the International Exhibition rejected all thirteen of his paintings; in 1880 the Salon jury again refused him a medal; and in 1881 President Grévy attempted to strike his name off the list of those awarded the Legion of Honour. Not even Courbet, whose life was turbulent enough, had to suffer in the same degree. Yet Courbet's subjects— *Les Casseurs de Pierres, Un Enterrement à Ornans, Bonjour, M. Courbet!, Les Demoiselles de la Seine, Retour de la Conférence, La Femme aux bas blancs*— seem to us today far more pointed, more aggressive and more obviously provocative. *Olympia* has none of the libidinousness of *Les Deux Dormeuses; La Femme au Perroquet* (1866) is modest by comparison with Courbet's painting of the same title. And Courbet could not even plead justification in the name of the old masters. But this was Manet's secret, and one which he never disclosed.

In considering Manet's work, one must see clearly the nature of his debt to the old masters, which has been so consistently misunderstood. First and foremost it was a debt of love, admiration and respect. They were his only true teachers. He learnt from them practically everything about the handling of paint; he never looked to them to provide him with subject-matter or ideas; but at the same time he did look to them to assist him with forms of pictorial presentation. And why not? He knew instinctively the subjects that he wanted to paint and the way in which he wanted to paint them, but he had no great confidence in his sense of composition. Thus one finds him in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* adapting a group of three figures from an engraving after Raphael, or in the *Portrait of Astruc* taking over (and inverting) the vertical division of the canvas in Titian's *Venus of Urbino* and substituting a seated figure for the recumbent nude. But pastiche was never in his mind, only the will to create a new and natural idiom commensurate with his infallible sense of vital actuality. "Colour", he is quoted as saying to Jeanniot, "is a matter of taste and sensibility. What one needs is something to say. Without that, goodnight! No-one is a painter who does not love painting above everything else. And then it is not sufficient to know all about technique. One has to be moved. Science is all very well, but for us you see imagination is more important".

For Manet there existed in Spain and Holland a tradition that was viable provided it could be brought up-to-date. Now the story of Spain's influence on French culture during the 19th century is both complex and fascinating. It originates with the Peninsula War and France's subsequent determination to retain political control over her southern neighbour. Spanish subjects play a large part in the work of writers and artists alike—Alfred de Musset, Victor Hugo, Théophile Gautier, Henri de Régnier, Delacroix, Constantin Guys, Gustave Doré and Courbet. Thus there is nothing inherently surprising in Manet's discovery of Spanish art. What is curious, however, is the fact that he painted Spanish subjects, not that he was influenced by Spanish masters such as Zurbaran, Murillo, Velasquez or Ribera. In 1861 he painted the portrait of a Spanish guitar-player; in 1862 he took advantage of the presence in Paris of a troupe of Spanish dancers to have them pose for him singly and in groups— *Le Ballet Espagnol, Lola de Valence* (Plate III), *Mariano Camprubi;* Victorine Meurend was dressed up in the costume of an *espada* and given a bull-ring setting (1862); he painted bull-fights before he had seen one; the two *Philosophes* and *Le Chiffonnier* (1865), despite a Baudelairean sentiment, walk straight out of Velasquez; he made a bid at imitating Goya's two *Majas* with his *Jeune Femme couchée en costume espagnol* (1862) and *Olympia.* Yet it was not until the summer of 1865 that Manet actually visited Spain, and even then he spent less than a fortnight in Madrid. The source of his knowledge of Spain and its art would seem therefore to have been the two vast collections of Spanish masterpieces assembled by Louis-Philippe and Marshal Soult. The former, containing 412 Spanish pictures collected for the King by Baron Taylor, was on view in the Louvre until 1848; the latter, consisting of 236 pictures captured as booty or given as tribute to the Marshal by numerous Spanish towns, was on view in his gallery in Paris until it was disposed of by auction in May 1852. So one can be relatively certain that Manet was well acquainted with the latter if not, on account of his youth, with the former. Still nothing seems to have prepared him for the shock of his visit to Madrid, as one can read in his letter to Fantin-Latour. The sight of "Velasquez alone made the journey worth while... He is the painter of painters. He didn't surprise me, I was enraptured... The most astonishing example of this great painter's work—and perhaps the most astonishing piece of painting ever done—is the picture described in the catalogue as *Portrait of a famous actor of the time of Philip IV (Pablillos de Valladolid).* The background disappears: the figure stands there dressed in black, alive, surrounded by air". In how many of his own portraits did Manet follow this formula!

Spain's stimulating influence transformed Manet. From her painters he took over a form of composition (encountered in *Les Petits Cavaliers)* especially suited to his naturalistic aims and based on an alternation of single figures and small groups, loosely juxtaposed not bound together in a tight design. (An instance of this at its most disastrous is *Sur la plage de Boulogne* of 1869). Then he discovered how to create a sense of space and atmosphere by purely tonal means: "Nevertheless", he wrote, "you would hardly believe how difficult it is to place a figure alone on a canvas, and to concentrate all the interest on this single and unique figure and still keep it living and real. To paint two figures which get their interest from the duality of two personalities is child's play in comparison". Most remarkable of all, it was in Spain that Manet discovered the fascination of out-door subjects, And his first paintings which really sparkled with sunlight were the bullfight series of 1866, which were worked up later in Paris from sketches made on the spot.

Manet, of course, never became a true Impressionist. He was not a painter of light, was not concerned with reflected tints and never discarded black from his palette. He was always at his happiest painting subjects in which the light came from directly behind the artist's head, thereby flattening out the objects he was painting, avoiding elaborate modelling and enabling him to surround things with a broad contour (Plate XII). True, his ideal was to attain to the freshness of an original impression, but when confronted directly with nature he was at a loss. (Even *Le Combat du "Kearsage" et de "L'Alabama"* (1864), an incident which he went specially to witness, was not painted on the spot.) Yet through close friendships with Degas and Claude Monet, through the influence of his two pupils Berthe Morisot and Eva Gonzalès, through Zola and others, his contacts with the Impressionist group became an important factor in his development during the years 1868-1876. Against his inclinations, Manet was hailed (1864) as the leader of a new movement. But in 1874 (as on every subsequent occasion) he refused to exhibit at the first Impressionist Exhibition. Nevertheless he was enticed out of his studio into the open air. It began with views of the Paris suburbs painted during the Commune; there followed the portrait of the de Nittis family in their garden (1870); then the views of the dunes and harbours at Oloron, Arcachon and Bordeaux (1871); *Les Hirondelles* (1873); the superb series of pictures (Plate IX) painted during a few weeks spent at Argenteuil in the summer of 1874 with Monet and Renoir—*En Bateau, Argenteuil, La Famille Monet dans le jardin, Claude Monet dans son atelier;* and finally the two delicious pictures of the Grand Canal in Venice (1875). During these years, Manet's palette became lighter and his pictures gayer in spirit. He turned away from antiquated subjects which conflicted with his simplified technique and began to express only things which immediately touched his senses. One feels him entering into his pictures not remaining on the outside. This was the more characterised by heaviness, a certain artificiality and an obvious reliance on others. 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In short, one finds the attention chiefly held by outstanding details: the still-life in the *Déjeuner*, the bedclothes in *Olympia*, the figure of the sergeant in the *Execution*. Manet could make paint sing as few other painters. More than that: in all these pictures one finds already those startling innovations of colour which so shocked his contemporaries. For example, he was the first painter who, when he wanted a white, black or green, unashamedly applied these colours in their pure state to his canvas. Then again, instead of working up a transparent colour from a ground, Manet applied colour in a single wash and obtained the equivalent of the old-fashioned transparency by true and exact relationships of tone. He painted, that is to say, as directly as possible, transposing his sensations immediately and thereby simplifying the painter's technique. "In painting only one thing is true", he wrote, "to get down at one go what one sees. If you bring that off it's all right. If not, you must start again. Anything else is false". This was the means by which Manet created his effect of spontaneity. Thus it is recorded that Antonin Proust's top-hat was removed and re-painted thirty times before the artist was satisfied, while Berthe Morisot says that Eva Gonzalès had to pose for her portrait forty times, because after each session Manet would wash out the painting of her head.

Despite Zola's self-satisfied pronouncement in 1868 that "the success of Edouard Manet is complete", no painter of the 19th century was as persistently persecuted and condemned. And none felt it more acutely. The Emperor, the critics, the public, the jury of the Salon—all were scandalised. His fame as a madman and eccentric was so widespread that even a customs officer at Hendaye recognised his name on a trunk. He hardly sold a picture before the age of forty. His only real successes at the Salon were the *Guitarrero* (1861), for which he was awarded an honourable mention, and *Le Bon Bock*, both of them new-old masters. Even in 1878 the jury of the International Exhibition rejected all thirteen of his paintings; in 1880 the Salon jury again refused him a medal; and in 1881 President Grévy attempted to strike his name off the list of those awarded the Legion of Honour. Not even Courbet, whose life was turbulent enough, had to suffer in the same degree. Yet Courbet's subjects— *Les Casseurs de Pierres, Un Enterrement à Ornans, Bonjour, M. Courbet!, Les Demoiselles de la Seine, Retour de la Conférence, La Femme aux bas blancs*— seem to us today far more pointed, more aggressive and more obviously provocative. *Olympia* has none of the libidinousness of *Les Deux Dormeuses; La Femme au Perroquet* (1866) is modest by comparison with Courbet's painting of the same title. And Courbet could not even plead justification in the name of the old masters. But this was Manet's secret, and one which he never disclosed.

In considering Manet's work, one must see clearly the nature of his debt to the old masters, which has been so consistently misunderstood. First and foremost it was a debt of love, admiration and respect. They were his only true teachers. He learnt from them practically everything about the handling of paint; he never looked to them to provide him with subject-matter or ideas; but at the same time he did look to them to assist him with forms of pictorial presentation. And why not? He knew instinctively the subjects that he wanted to paint and the way in which he wanted to paint them, but he had no great confidence in his sense of composition. Thus one finds him in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* adapting a group of three figures from an engraving after Raphael, or in the *Portrait of Astruc* taking over (and inverting) the vertical division of the canvas in Titian's *Venus of Urbino* and substituting a seated figure for the recumbent nude. But pastiche was never in his mind, only the will to create a new and natural idiom commensurate with his infallible sense of vital actuality. "Colour", he is quoted as saying to Jeanniot, "is a matter of taste and sensibility. What one needs is something to say. Without that, goodnight! No-one is a painter who does not love painting above everything else. And then it is not sufficient to know all about technique. One has to be moved. Science is all very well, but for us you see imagination is more important".

For Manet there existed in Spain and Holland a tradition that was viable provided it could be brought up-to-date. Now the story of Spain's influence on French culture during the 19th century is both complex and fascinating. It originates with the Peninsula War and France's subsequent determination to retain political control over her southern neighbour. Spanish subjects play a large part in the work of writers and artists alike—Alfred de Musset, Victor Hugo, Théophile Gautier, Henri de Régnier, Delacroix, Constantin Guys, Gustave Doré and Courbet. Thus there is nothing inherently surprising in Manet's discovery of Spanish art. What is curious, however, is the fact that he painted Spanish subjects, not that he was influenced by Spanish masters such as Zurbaran, Murillo, Velasquez or Ribera. In 1861 he painted the portrait of a Spanish guitar-player; in 1862 he took advantage of the presence in Paris of a troupe of Spanish dancers to have them pose for him singly and in groups— *Le Ballet Espagnol, Lola de Valence* (Plate III), *Mariano Camprubi;* Victorine Meurend was dressed up in the costume of an *espada* and given a bull-ring setting (1862); he painted bull-fights before he had seen one; the two *Philosophes* and *Le Chiffonnier* (1865), despite a Baudelairean sentiment, walk straight out of Velasquez; he made a bid at imitating Goya's two *Majas* with his *Jeune Femme couchée en costume espagnol* (1862) and *Olympia.* Yet it was not until the summer of 1865 that Manet actually visited Spain, and even then he spent less than a fortnight in Madrid. The source of his knowledge of Spain and its art would seem therefore to have been the two vast collections of Spanish masterpieces assembled by Louis-Philippe and Marshal Soult. The former, containing 412 Spanish pictures collected for the King by Baron Taylor, was on view in the Louvre until 1848; the latter, consisting of 236 pictures captured as booty or given as tribute to the Marshal by numerous Spanish towns, was on view in his gallery in Paris until it was disposed of by auction in May 1852. So one can be relatively certain that Manet was well acquainted with the latter if not, on account of his youth, with the former. Still nothing seems to have prepared him for the shock of his visit to Madrid, as one can read in his letter to Fantin-Latour. The sight of "Velasquez alone made the journey worth while... He is the painter of painters. He didn't surprise me, I was enraptured... The most astonishing example of this great painter's work—and perhaps the most astonishing piece of painting ever done—is the picture described in the catalogue as *Portrait of a famous actor of the time of Philip IV (Pablillos de Valladolid).* The background disappears: the figure stands there dressed in black, alive, surrounded by air". In how many of his own portraits did Manet follow this formula!

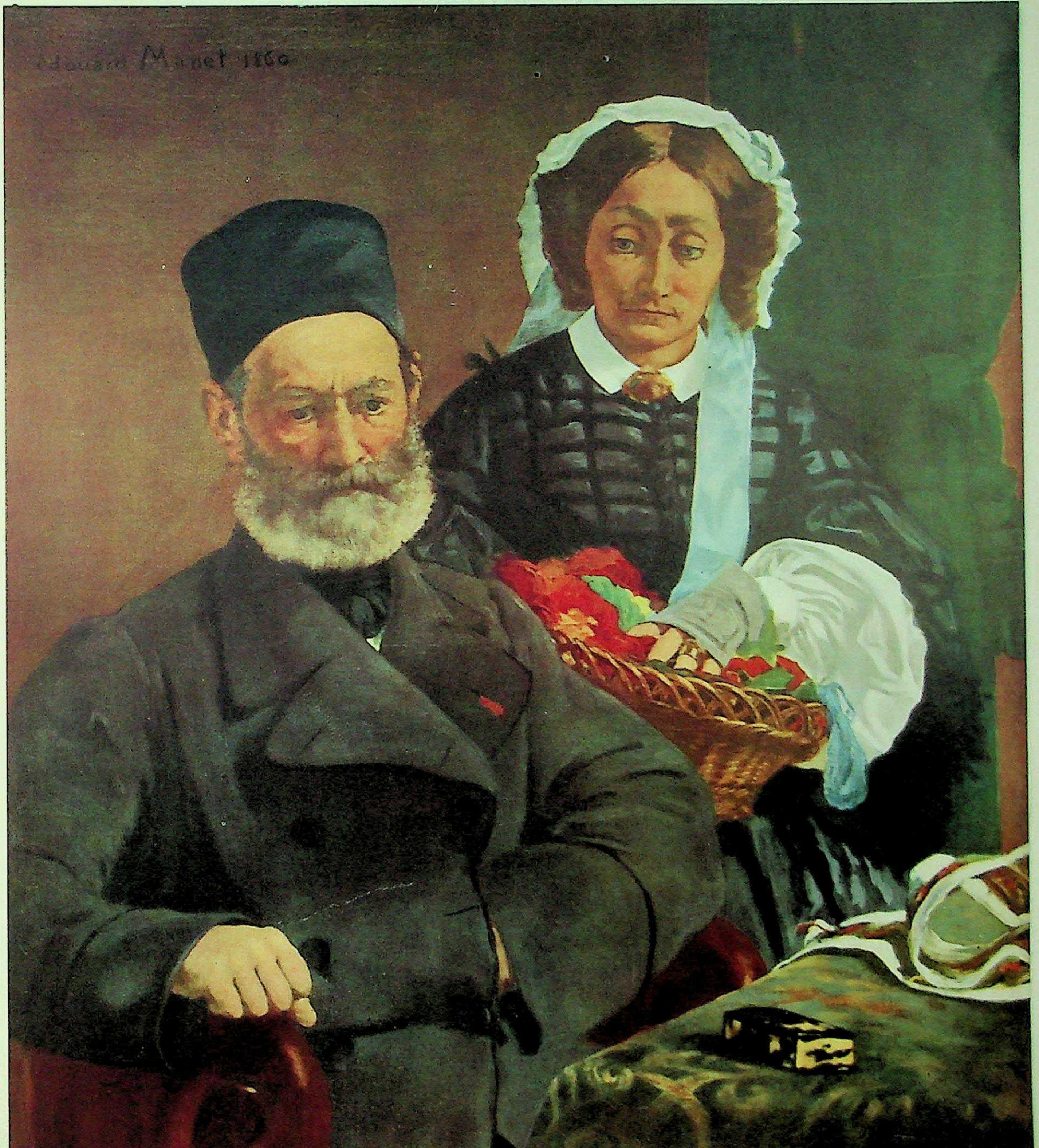
Spain's stimulating influence transformed Manet. From her painters he took over a form of composition (encountered in *Les Petits Cavaliers)* especially suited to his naturalistic aims and based on an alternation of single figures and small groups, loosely juxtaposed not bound together in a tight design. (An instance of this at its most disastrous is *Sur la plage de Boulogne* of 1869). Then he discovered how to create a sense of space and atmosphere by purely tonal means: "Nevertheless", he wrote, "you would hardly believe how difficult it is to place a figure alone on a canvas, and to concentrate all the interest on this single and unique figure and still keep it living and real. To paint two figures which get their interest from the duality of two personalities is child's play in comparison". Most remarkable of all, it was in Spain that Manet discovered the fascination of out-door subjects, And his first paintings which really sparkled with sunlight were the bullfight series of 1866, which were worked up later in Paris from sketches made on the spot.

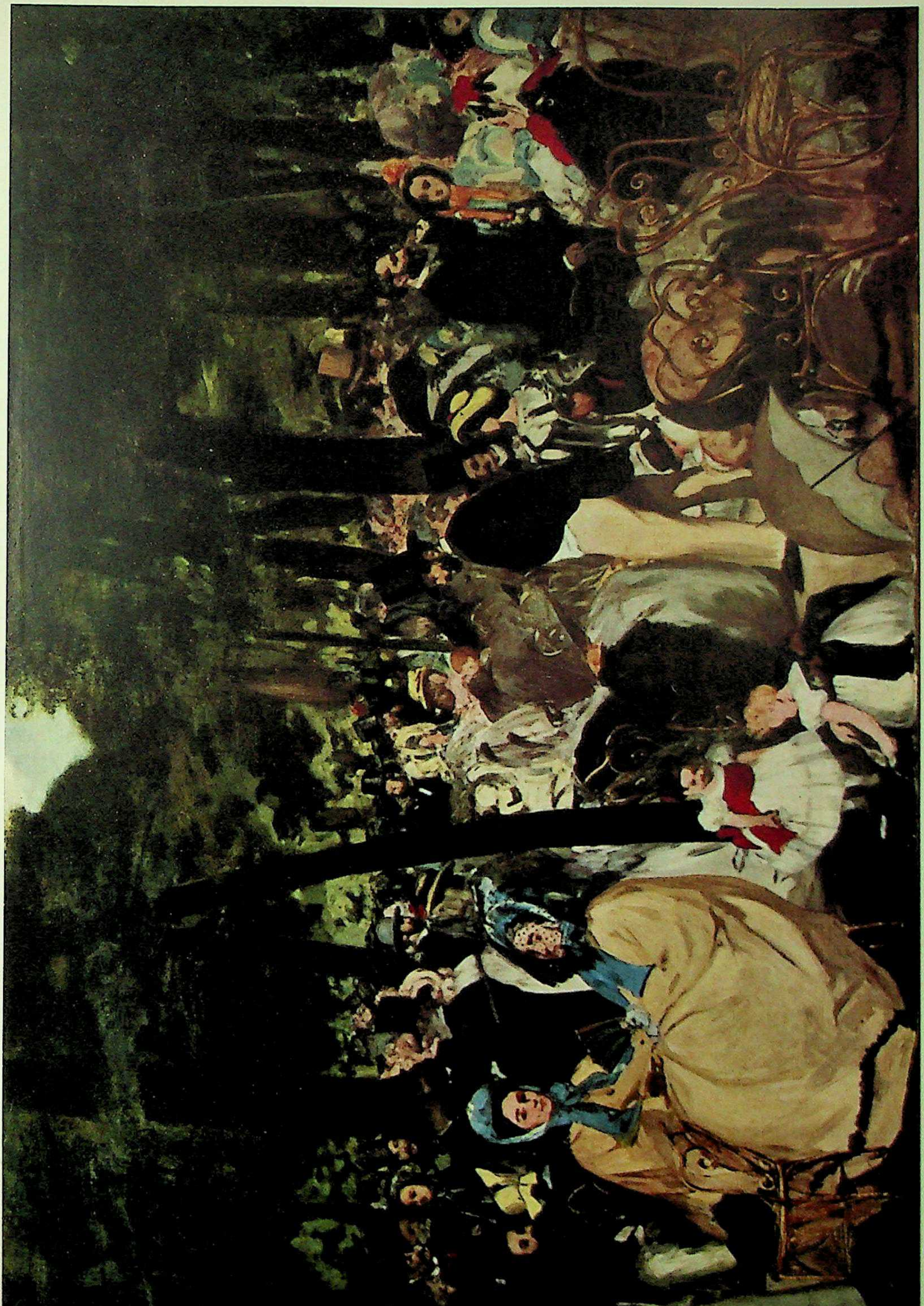
Manet, of course, never became a true Impressionist. He was not a painter of light, was not concerned with reflected tints and never discarded black from his palette. He was always at his happiest painting subjects in which the light came from directly behind the artist's head, thereby flattening out the objects he was painting, avoiding elaborate modelling and enabling him to surround things with a broad contour (Plate XII). True, his ideal was to attain to the freshness of an original impression, but when confronted directly with nature he was at a loss. (Even *Le Combat du "Kearsage" et de "L'Alabama"* (1864), an incident which he went specially to witness, was not painted on the spot.) Yet through close friendships with Degas and Claude Monet, through the influence of his two pupils Berthe Morisot and Eva Gonzalès, through Zola and others, his contacts with the Impressionist group became an important factor in his development during the years 1868-1876. Against his inclinations, Manet was hailed (1864) as the leader of a new movement. But in 1874 (as on every subsequent occasion) he refused to exhibit at the first Impressionist Exhibition. Nevertheless he was enticed out of his studio into the open air. It began with views of the Paris suburbs painted during the Commune; there followed the portrait of the de Nittis family in their garden (1870); then the views of the dunes and harbours at Oloron, Arcachon and Bordeaux (1871); *Les Hirondelles* (1873); the superb series of pictures (Plate IX) painted during a few weeks spent at Argenteuil in the summer of 1874 with Monet and Renoir—*En Bateau, Argenteuil, La Famille Monet dans le jardin, Claude Monet dans son atelier;* and finally the two delicious pictures of the Grand Canal in Venice (1875). During these years, Manet's palette became lighter and his pictures gayer in spirit. He turned away from antiquated subjects which conflicted with his simplified technique and began to express only things which immediately touched his senses. One feels him entering into his pictures not remaining on the outside. This was the period of some of his most intense and loving portraiture—Berthe Morisot, Desboutins, Marguerite de Conflans, and above all the supreme period piece *La Dame aux éventails* (Nina de Callias) of 1874. Nevertheless, fearful of chance effects and transient groupings, Manet again withdrew, and from *Le Linge* (1876) till his death his great paintings were posed in the studio or elsewhere. This applies equally to *Madame Manet dans la serre* (1879), the *Portrait de Pertuiset* (1881), *Chez le Père Lathuille* (1879), *La Serveuse de Bocks* (1878) or *Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère.*

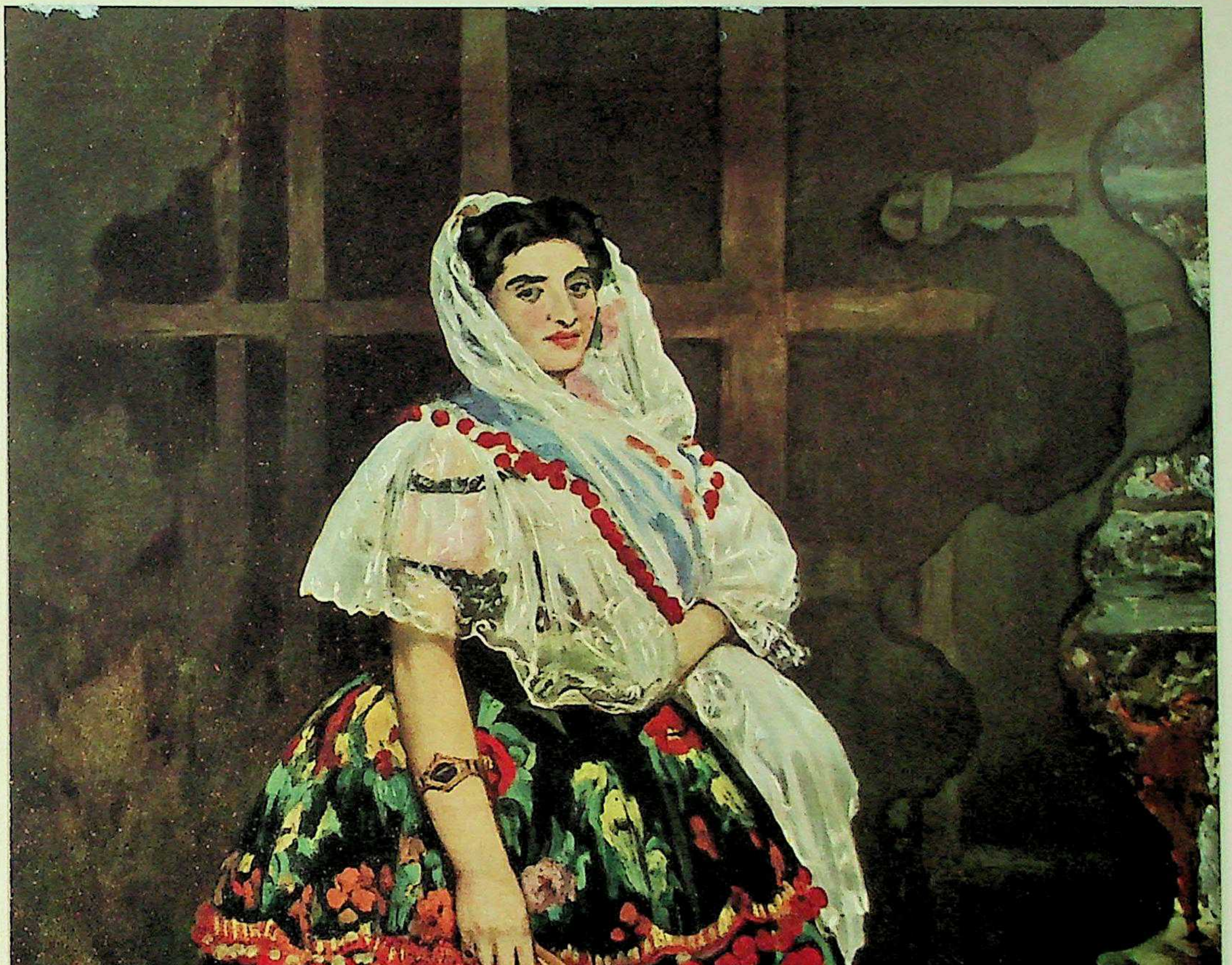
Most of Manet's supreme achievements were painted after 1873, at which date his art underwent a great change. His use of black became less insistent and his sense of design, though greater, was also easier. He had at last learnt to reconcile casual appearances with a strongly marked formal framework and was thereby enabled to indulge in spatial experiences denied to many of his friends. This was the secret of his later years, the means by which his art could go on developing. Always in search of ways to heighten the realism of his pictures, he had rejected the easy unselective methods of Courbet as leading to vulgarity. But the impressionists had an elegance of vision after his own heart. Yet Manet was aware of the gulf that lay between himself and them, aware too of their limitations. His use of colour was more sonorous and he did not practice the divided touch. Moreover, though the manipulation of paint was almost his prime concern, and although he did not rely greatly on his intellectual powers or sense of form, he did nevertheless aim higher than the pure *morceau de belle peinture.* No other painter of his day could achieve an intensity, a haunting tenseness equal to Manet. Manet's idiom had to be sufficiently elastic for things remembered and things observed to be so inextricably bound together by his brush that they were indistinguishable. Now Manet was not above learning from his contemporaries, predominantly from Degas, who was, like himself, a man of independent means and who to some extent shared and understood his point of view. There was truth in Zola's criticism of the Impressionists that "they are too easily satisfied. They are wrong to disregard the solidity of carefully thought out works. That's why one has reason to fear that they will do no more than prepare the way for the great artist of the future whom we all anxiously await". Manet and Degas, like Cézanne and Seurat, were among the first to heed the warning.

From 1879 until his death, on April 30th 1883, Manet's health rapidly weakened; often he was unable to move and incapable of any great physical exertions. The pictures of these last years— for the most part slender pastel portraits of elegant ladies of the town (Cover, Plate XV), whom he encouraged to visit him in his studio—therefore became increasingly weak and flashy. After a brilliant flare-up in the paintings of the Rue de Berne and the Cabaret Reichshoffen (1878), the extreme limits of his impressionism, he fell into a monotony broken only by *Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère* (Plate XIII). Here and there a still-life of fruit or flowers (Plate XIV)—no longer so obviously Chardinesque as his earlier ones—supremely light and delicate in its use of paint, appeared as a charming diversion. But no more. Yet with *Un Bar* Manet transcended himself and left as his last great work one of the most amazing and imaginative visual experiences of the 19th century. J.K. Huysmans, a realist literary critic of aesthetic pretentions, saw in the picture no more than a downright statement about prostitution. We see— against the gay, *mouvementé* setting of the interior of a music-hall—an impassive, rather bored barmaid, to whom overtures are being made by a seemingly respectable, elderly gentleman. Potentially not a pleasing subject; but by the virtuosity of his execution Manet has transformed it into a noble, imaginative experience. It is a monument to a period and a work of art which is timeless. It is the creation of an artist at the height of his powers. But Manet's life was cut short within a year of its completion.

Manet was not a great inventive genius and he was aware of his imaginative limitations. He was objective, unconcerned with emotional subtleties, unpsychological and not innately clever. But he was one of the purest natural painters the world has ever known. It is the sheer mastery revealed in his every brush-stroke which enables us to overlook his shortcomings. His sense of actuality and immediacy, that continues to thrill us today, is inseparable from his use of paint. Therein resides his greatness. Baudelaire, with his phenomenal insight, was writing as early as 1875: "He will never entirely overcome the gaps in his temperament. But at least he has a temperament".


Edouard Manet 1860





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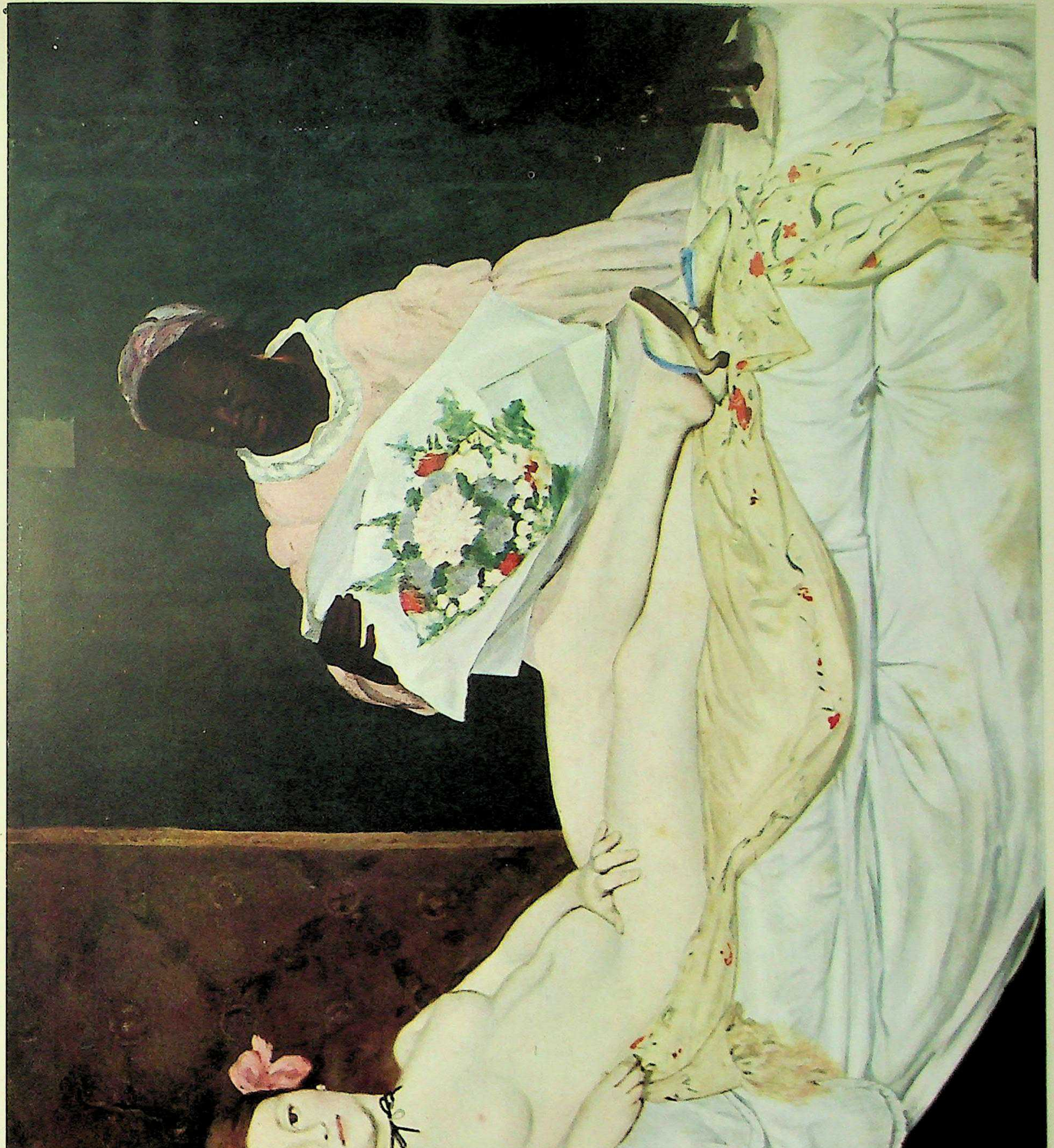

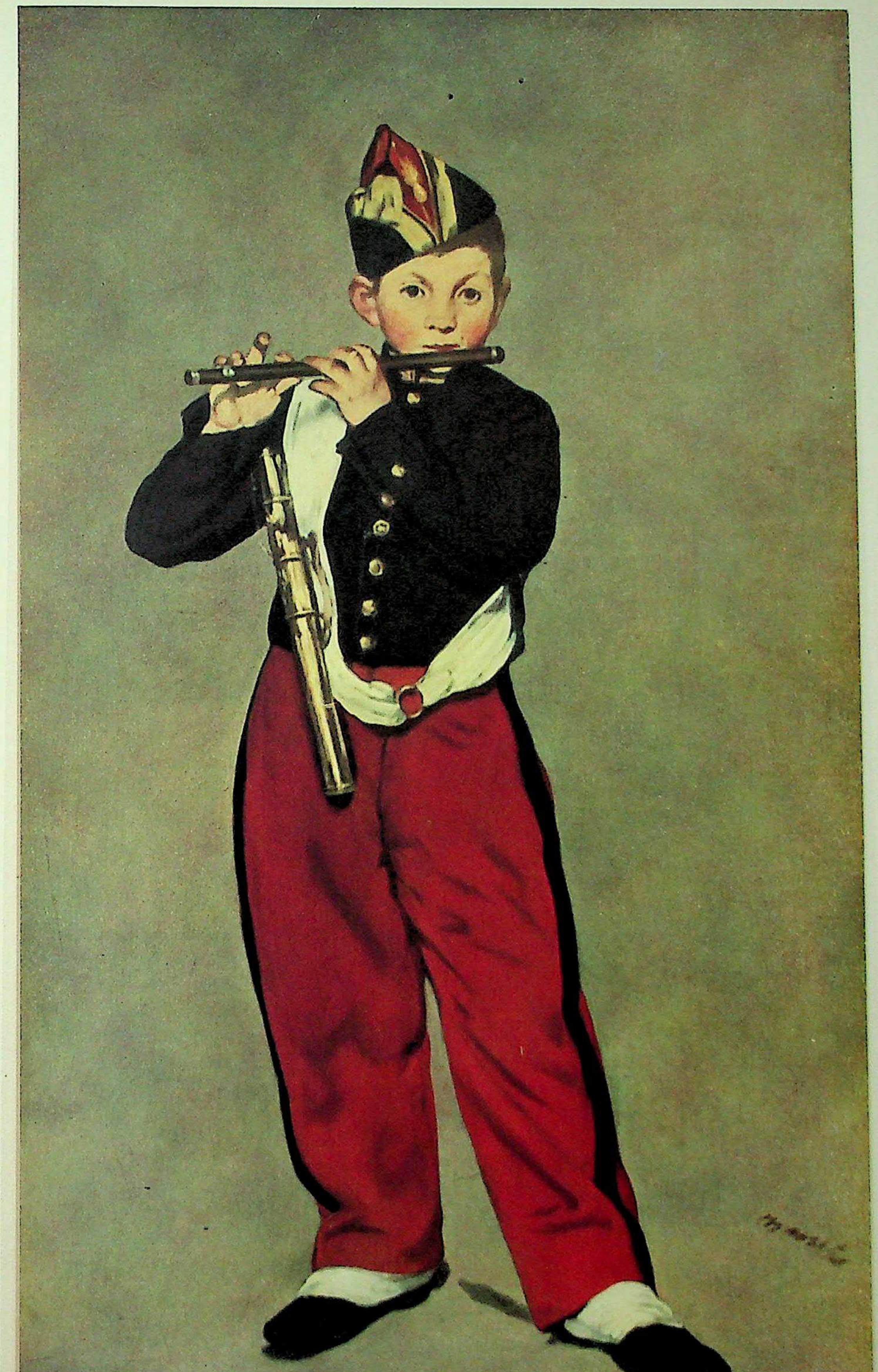

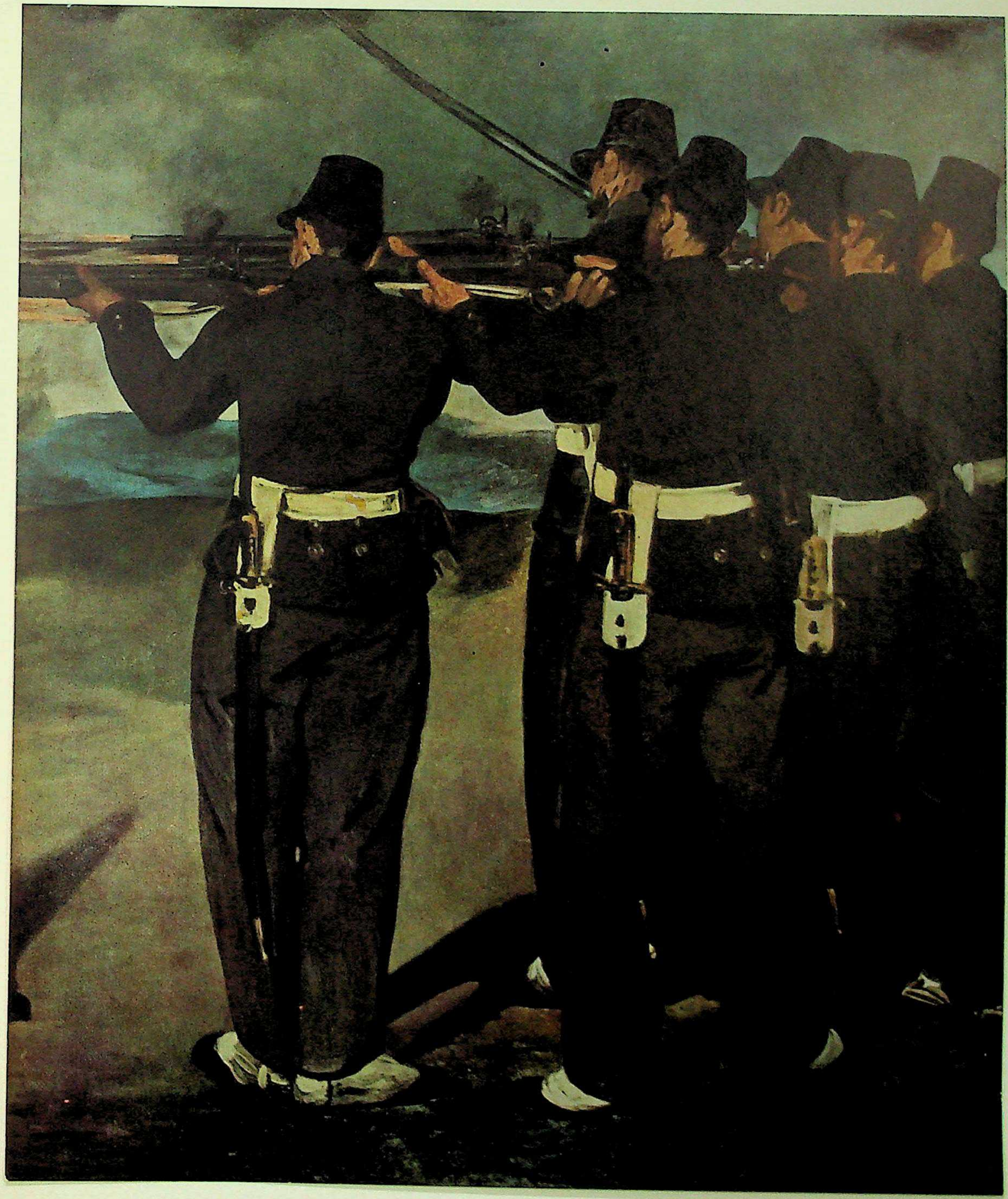

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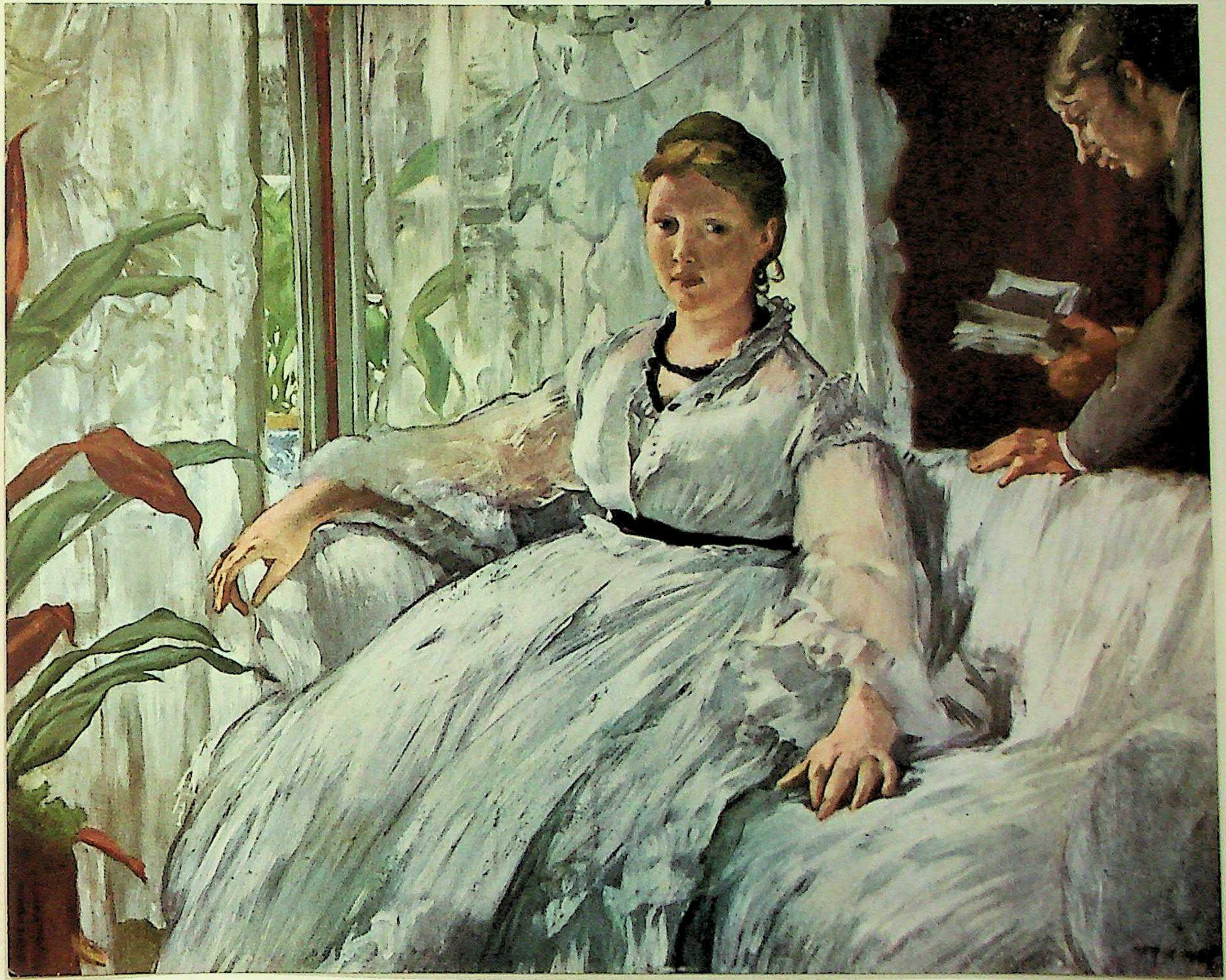

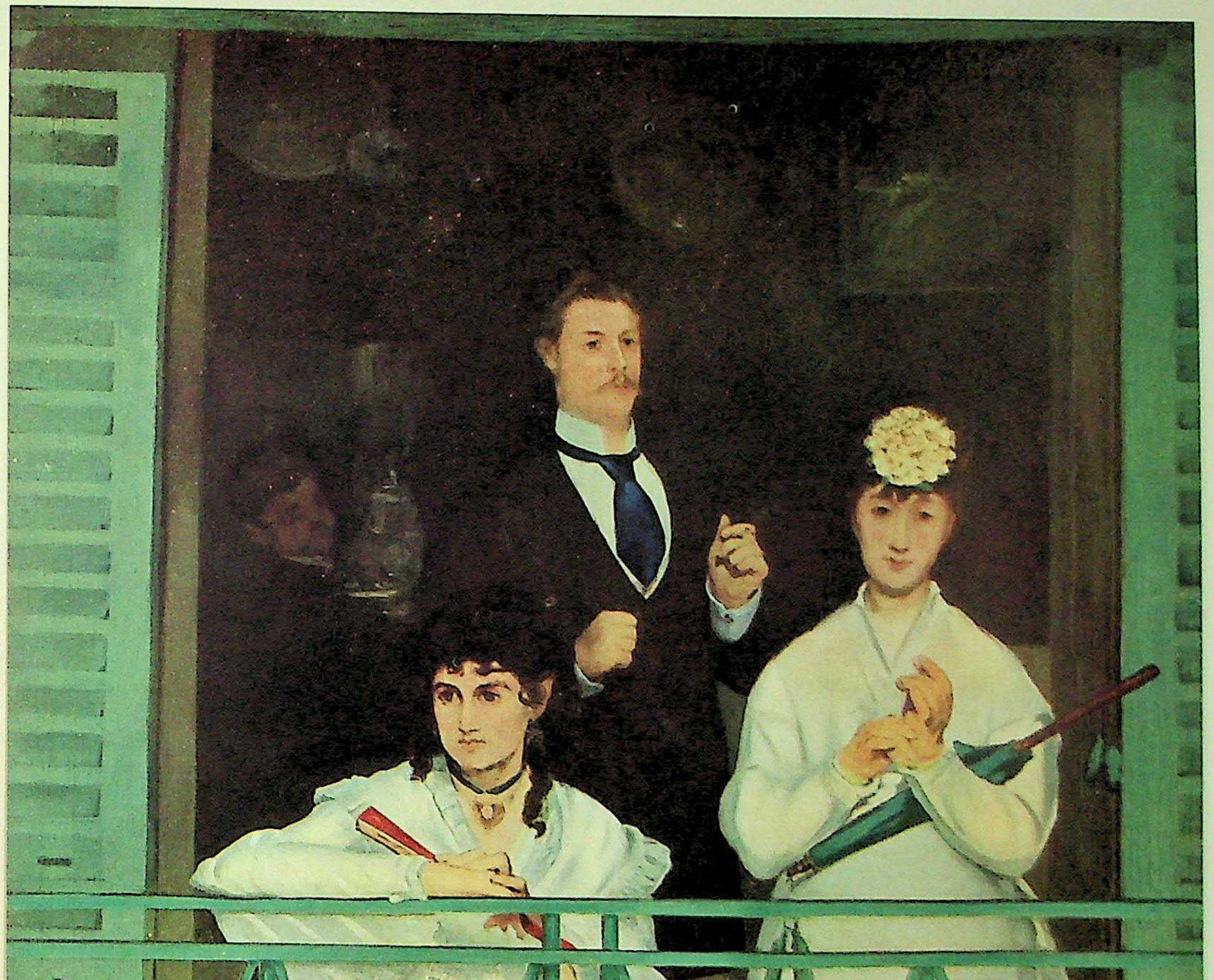

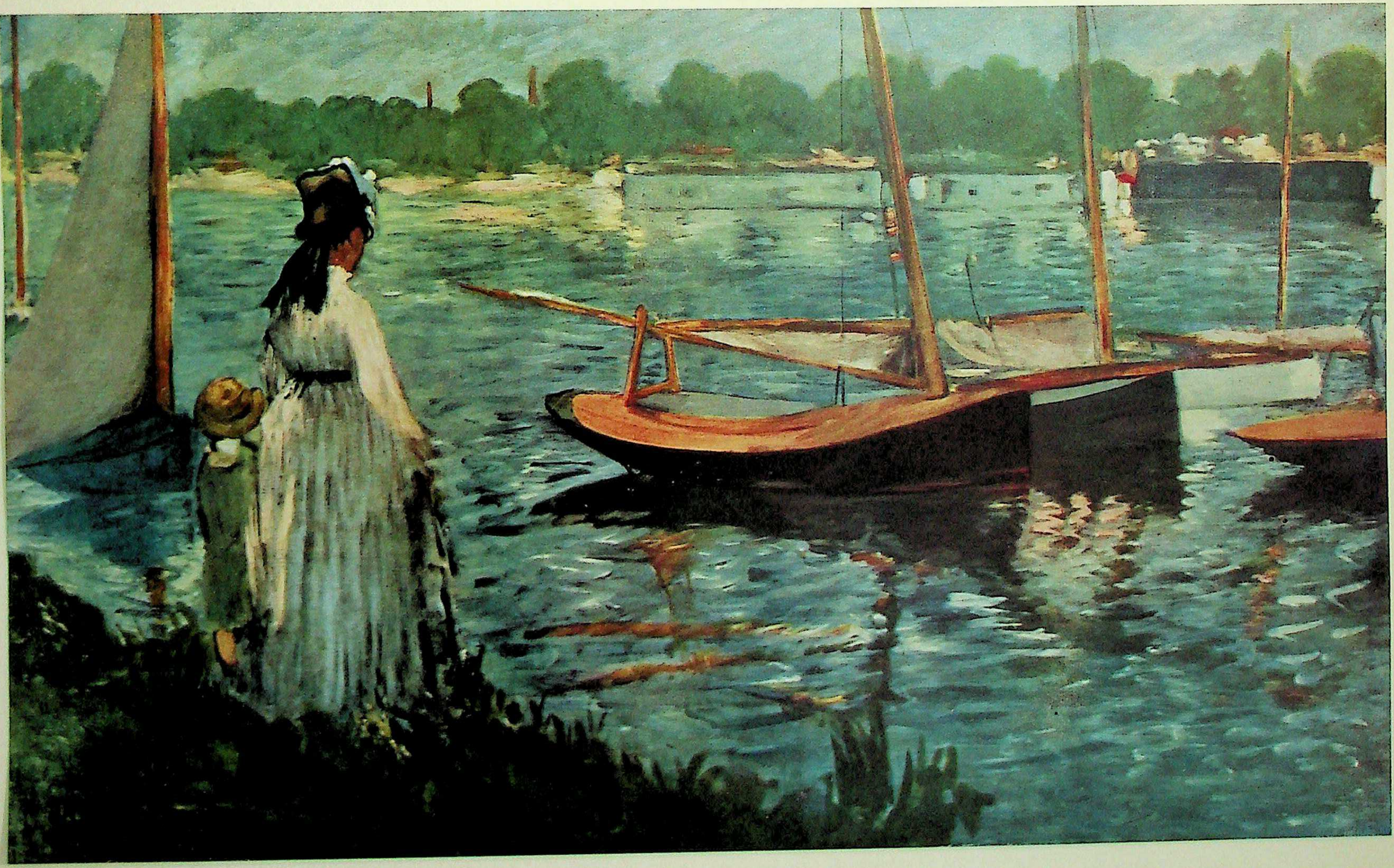

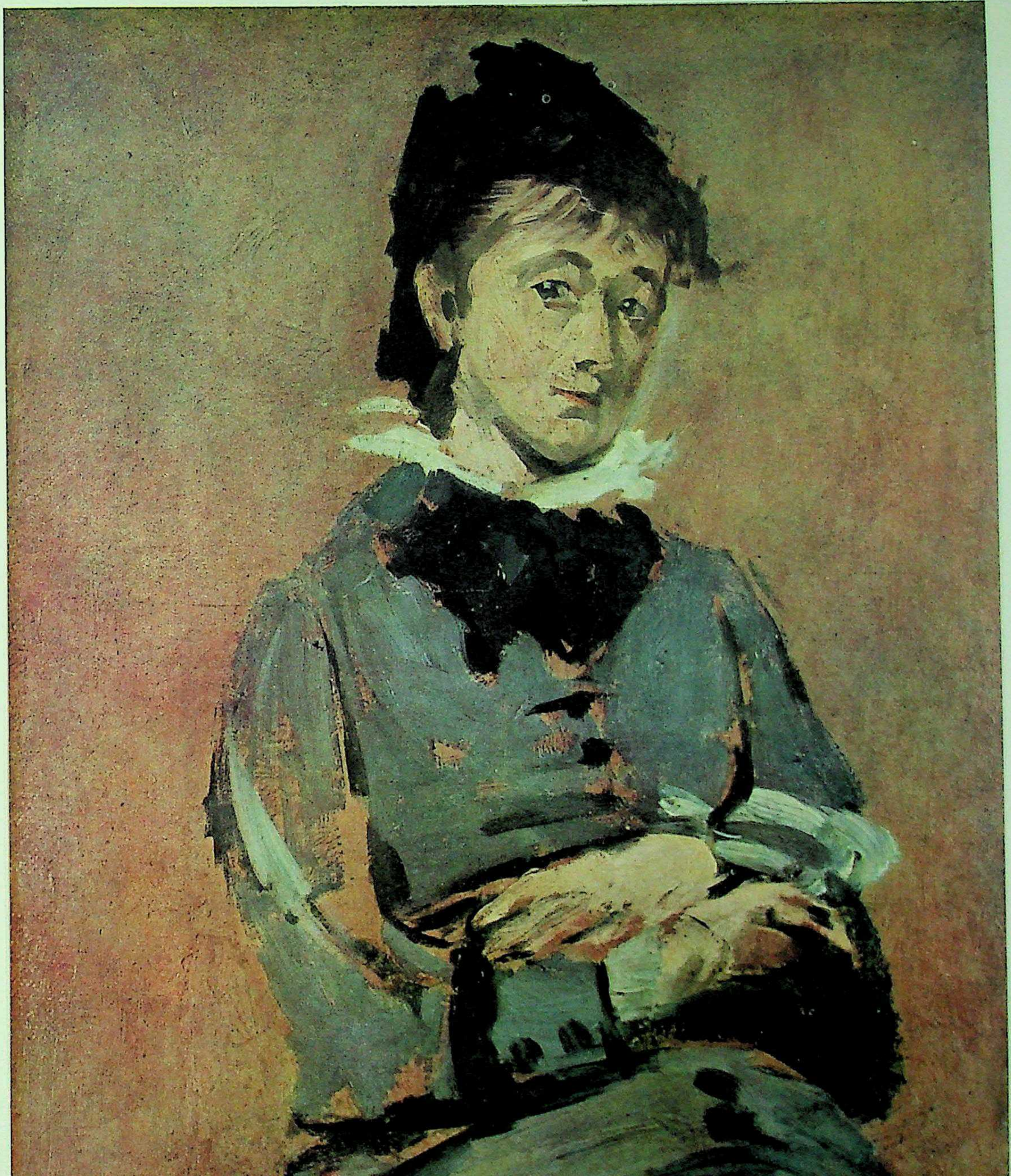

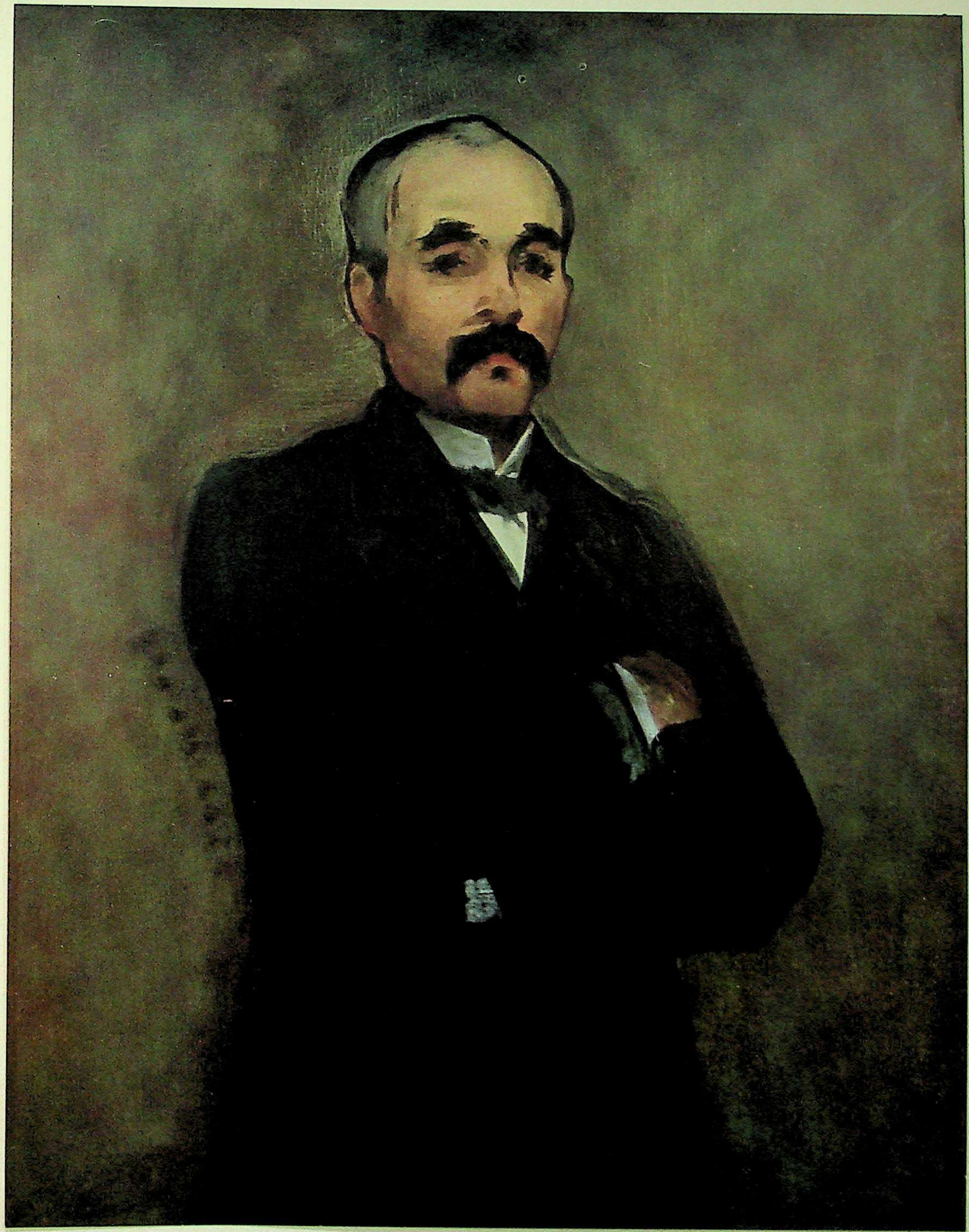

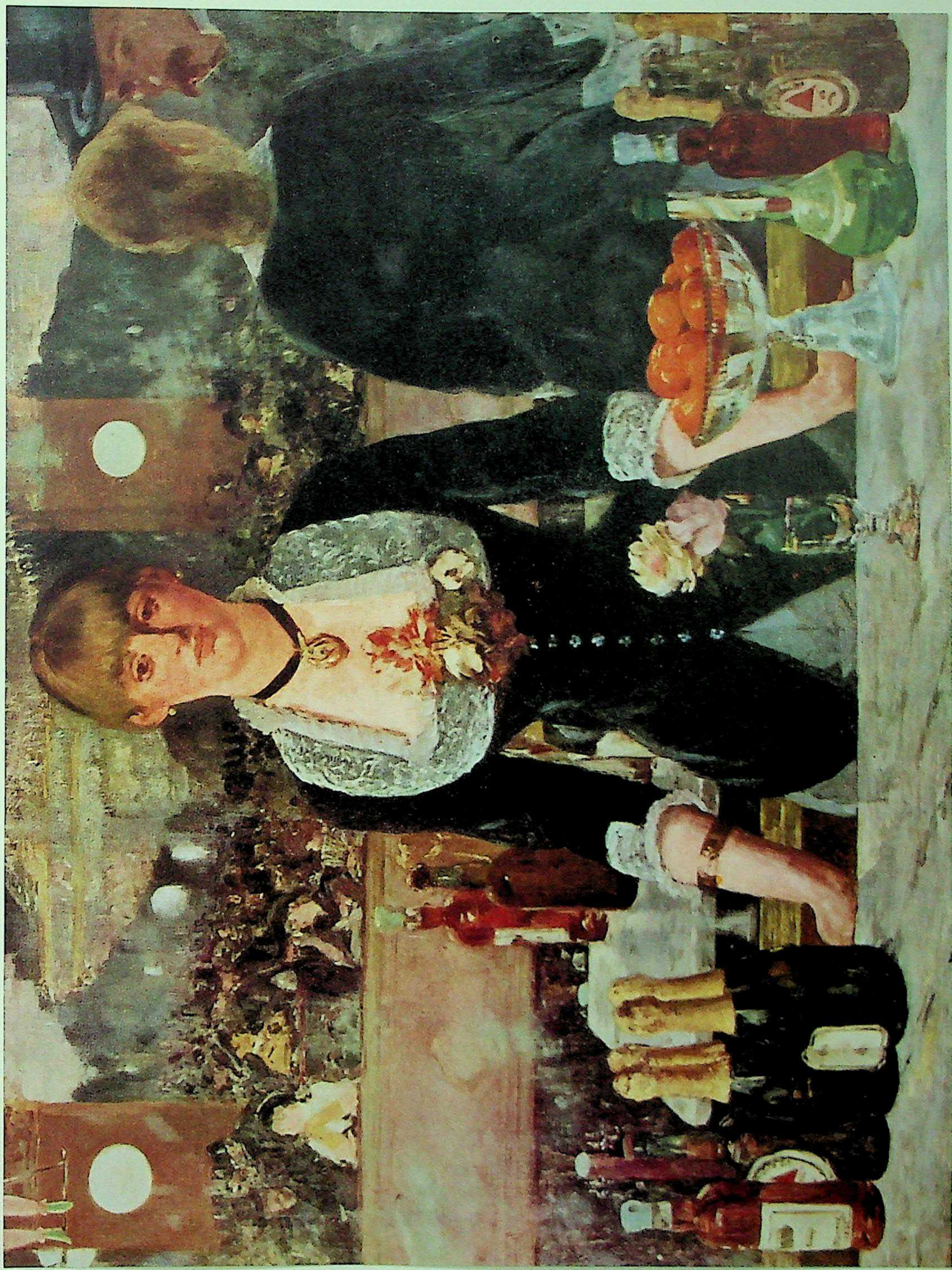

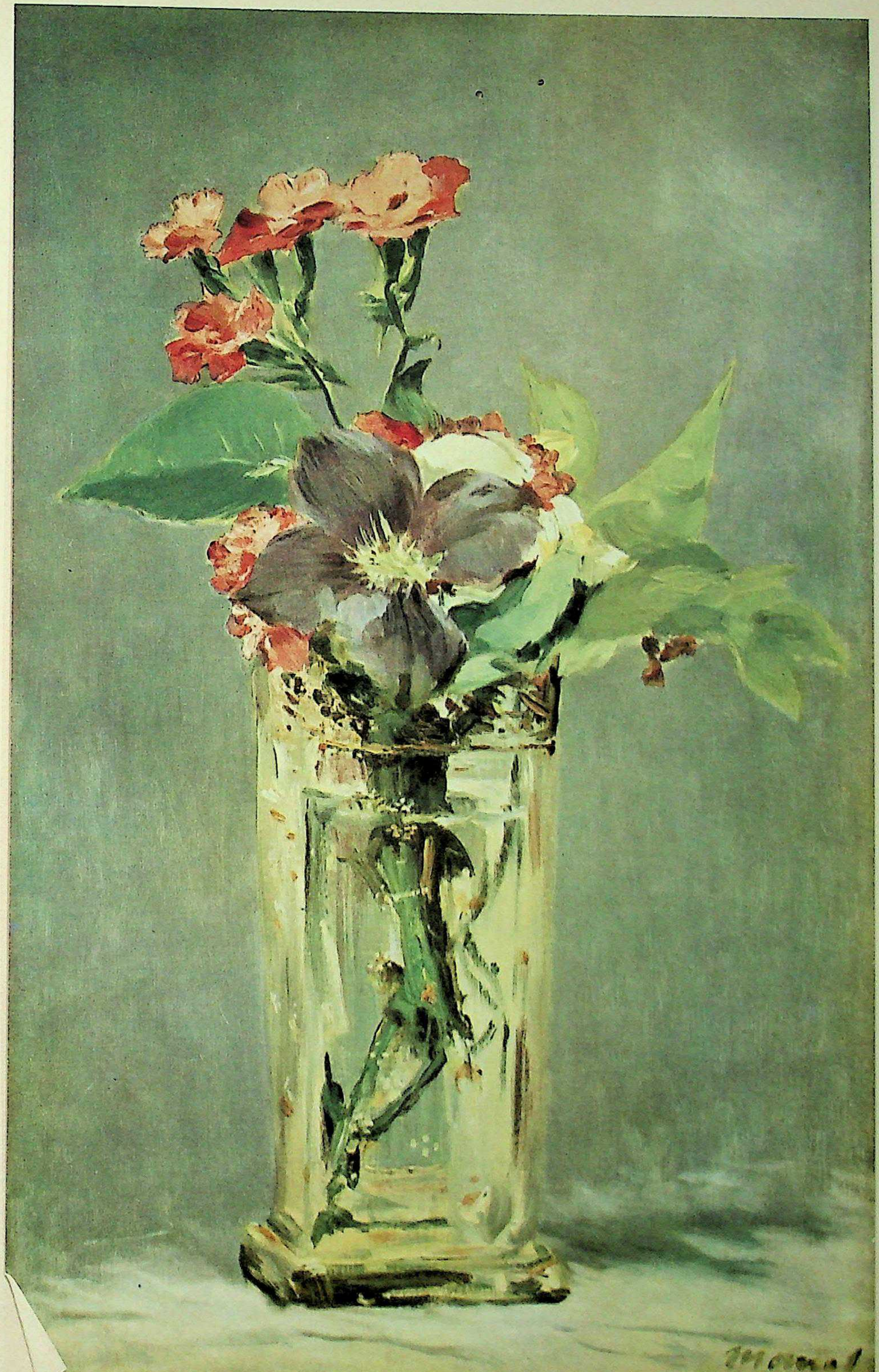
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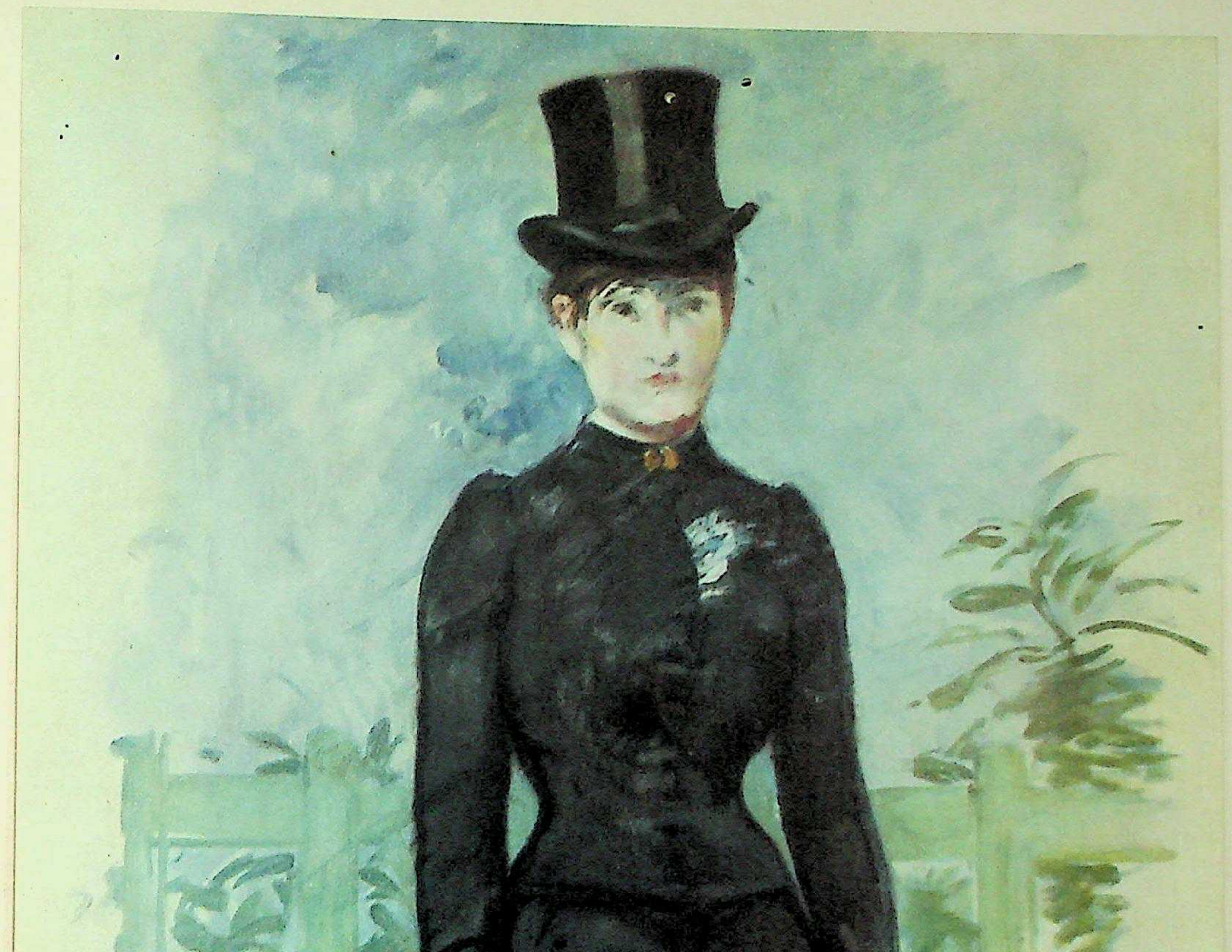

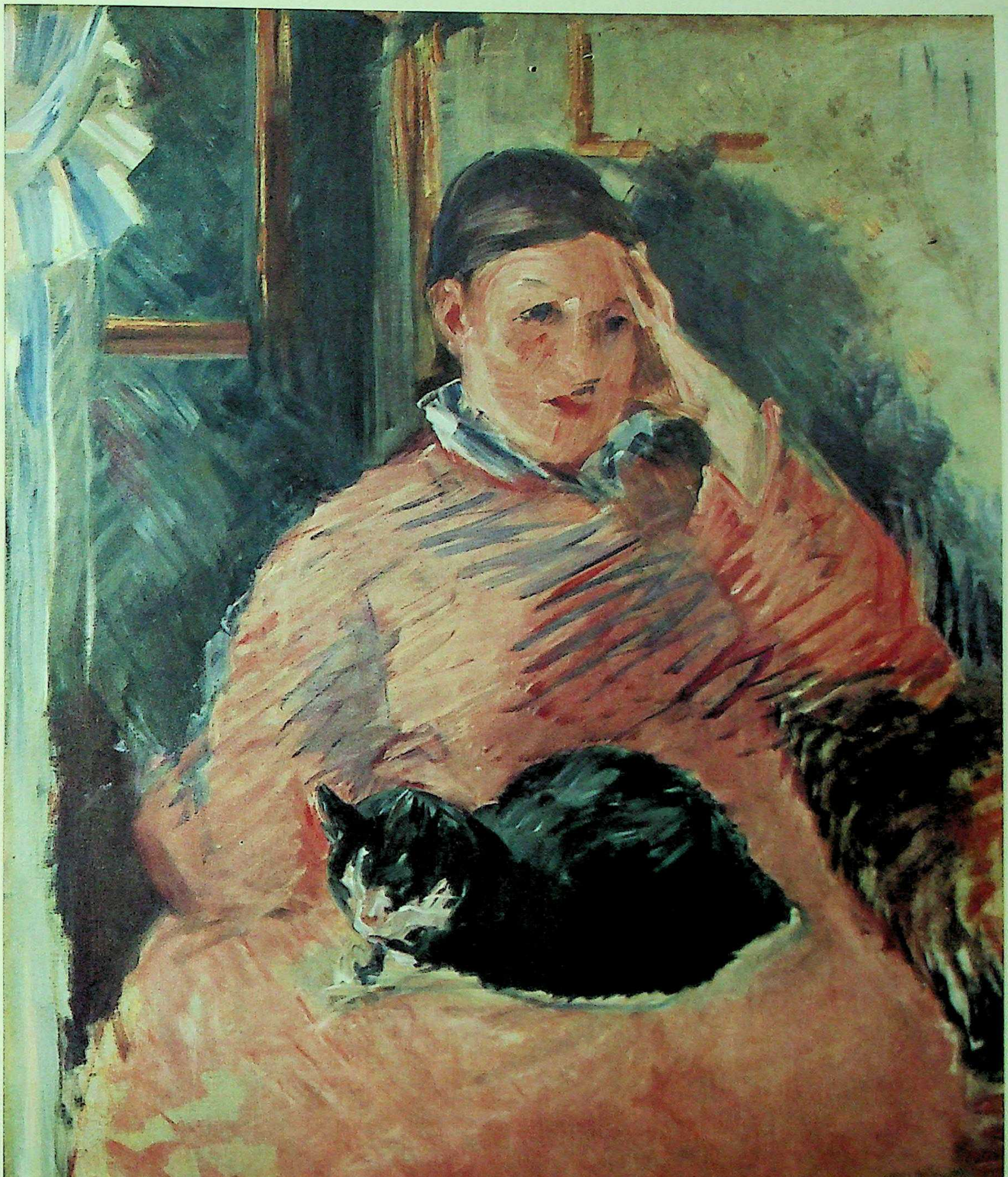

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